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INFO RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0128  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 1714  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1542  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 9520  
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 3377  
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE PRIORITY 0599  
RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA PRIORITY 9884  
RUEHKSO/AMCONSUL SAPPORO PRIORITY 8427  
RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA PRIORITY 7293  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHMFIS/COMUSJAPAN YOKOTA AB JA PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 004031

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/18/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV MARR JA

SUBJECT: GSDF MISSION TO IRAQ HAILED AS IMPORTANT MILESTONE

REF: TOKYO 3984

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer. Reason: 1.4(B)(D)

¶11. (C) Summary: Media and political reaction to the July 17 withdrawal of the last Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) unit from Iraq on has focused on the success of the mission and its contributions to U.S.-Japan relations. Japanese officials are optimistic that the GSDF's positive experience in Samawah has set an important precedent for future overseas dispatches. Defense Minister Fukushiro Nukaga, who was on hand in Kuwait to welcome the departing GSDF troops, called for the establishment of a permanent law to facilitate the dispatch of Japanese forces abroad. Senior Japan Defense Agency (JDA) officials emphasize that Japan will maintain its air support operations in Kuwait and maritime refueling activities in the Indian Ocean despite the pullout from Samawah. They caution, however, that new deployments will depend on the ruling coalition's ability to pass new legislation. End Summary.

Mission Accomplished

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¶12. (SBU) Japanese media and public reaction following the completion of the Self Defense Force (SDF) mission in Iraq has been overwhelmingly positive. News of the final withdrawal of GSDF units on July 17 had to compete with developments on the Korean Peninsula, but the story did make the front pages in all the major dailies. Press coverage focused on the success of the mission rather than the decision to withdraw. In a July 18 editorial, the usually critical Mainichi Shimbun praised the mission as a success, noting that the SDF completed the deployment without a single casualty. The Mainichi also termed the dispatch a "symbol of Koizumi diplomacy" that set the stage for "Japan to move on to the next stage of SDF cooperation with the United States."

The conservative Yomiuri hailed the government's decision to dispatch forces outside of the traditional UN framework. The only mildly critical comment came from the liberal Asahi Shimbun, which warned of the dangers faced by the Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) personnel remaining in theater.

¶13. (SBU) The media also highlighted positive reaction from local residents in Samawah about the GSDF deployment. A Kyodo news poll taken in June showed a 79 percent satisfaction rate for the GSDF contingent among residents of Muthana Province. Donations of medical supplies and facilities by the departing GSDF unit also received prominent

press play.

¶4. (C) Japanese officials and politicians have put a similarly positive spin on the return of the GSDF from Iraq. Former Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba told visiting DUSD Lawless that he has publicly credited Japan's dispatch to Iraq for the close support the U.S. provided Japan in response to the July 5 North Korean missile launches. In a July 6 meeting with a senior U.S. military official, MOFA North American Affairs Director General Chikao Kawai commented that the success of the Iraq mission will make it much easier for Japan to win domestic support for future overseas deployments. Japan Defense Agency (JDA) Director General for International Affairs Kenjiro Monji remarked to the embassy that the SDF's opportunity to work with coalition forces in Iraq and the Indian Ocean could serve as the basis for cooperation with NATO and other partners in future operations.

Thinking Ahead...

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¶5. (C) Japanese defense officials emphasize that Japan will continue to contribute to coalition efforts in Iraq and the Indian Ocean despite the Samawah withdrawal. Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Defense Research Policy Committee Staff Director Shigenobu Tamura told the embassy that extension of the special law allowing Maritime Self-Defense Forces (MSDF) operations in the Indian Ocean is the government's top defense-related legislative priority for the Autumn Diet session. Defense Minister Nukaga, on hand in Kuwait to welcome the final contingent of GSDF troops, publicly urged the Diet to also pass a permanent dispatch law

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that would allow the government to deploy SDF forces without securing specific Diet authorization.

...Cautiously

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¶6. (C) Other JDA officials have tried to downplay expectations for any new initiatives, at least in the near term. JDA Vice Minister Takemasa Moriya told visiting Combined Forces Commander for Afghanistan Gen. Karl Eikenberry that an SDF dispatch to Afghanistan would be difficult given legal restrictions on the SDF's ability to use deadly force (Reftel). The LDP's Tamura also cautioned that the Diet is unlikely to begin deliberations on permanent dispatch legislation until the next Regular Session, which convenes in January, 2007.

¶7. (C) Comment: The positive coverage of the completion of the GSDF mission was in marked contrast with the media and opposition parties' sharp criticism that followed the Prime Minister's 2003 decision to dispatch forces to Iraq. The perception that the GSDF mission was a complete success should facilitate deliberations on a permanent SDF dispatch law in the Diet as well as ensure an extension of Japanese activities in Kuwait and the Indian Ocean this Fall. Decisions on possible new commitments, however, are likely to be put off until the next Prime Minister is selected in September. End Comment.

SCHIEFFER